

German U-Boat

156

Brought War To

Aruba

February 16, 1942

U-BOAT 156

C:3

LAGO-ARUBA

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**Public Relations Department
Lago Oil & Transport Co., Ltd.
Aruba, Netherlands Antilles**

Four Lago lake tankers were torpedoes Feb. 16, 1942, and Lago Refinery was the first Western Hemisphere land target hit by the enemy

The roar of destruction shattered the quiet night. An explosion-ripped tanker spewed forth flaming crude oil. Crewmen screamed in fire-enveloped quarters. Some scrambled to lifeboats. Others flung themselves into the water. Many died. It was 0131, Feb. 16, 1942. World War II had been brought to Aruba by the German Reich Navy U-boat 156, Kapitanleutnant Werner Hartenstein, commanding.

The U-156 was commissioned Sept. 4, 1941. Tradition, so much a part of all world navies, constituted the pomp in the ceremonies in which a full-dressed Hartenstein took over the command of the submarine while his full-dressed crew stood rigidly at attention on the vessel's deck. The ceremony took place in Bremen in the yards of the Weser Shipbuilding Company. It was a green crew the submarine commander addressed. The crew knew this, and knew there would be many months of intensive training ahead administered by a strict disciplinarian and an excellent seaman whose naval career had begun in 1928 as a member of the German Weimar Republic Navy.

There were men in the new crew who feared Hartenstein. He was an unrelenting taskmaster. To him accomplishment was matter of fact, the means incidental. Hardly dignified, but indicative of his aggressive character, was the "Crazy Dog" nickname his crew later gave him. He was neither tall, nor stocky. His was a wiry, slight but solid frame that he unfailingly held erect. His posture was a manifestation of the man's mien: proper and correct. Hartenstein never married; he was wedded to the sea which occupied fifteen of his thirty-three years and finally claimed his life. The German commander had been an artillery officer aboard heavy naval craft. At the beginning of World War II, he was transferred to the command of the subchaser Jaguar. He earned the Iron Cross, first and second class, and the German Cross in Gold before entering the underwater service. The U-156 was his first submarine command.

Out from Bremen glided the U-156 destined for Kiel and much training for the crew in between. The training was geared to the Spartan simplicity of submarine life. Everything that could happen in battle was simulated. The crew learned about their boat, and they also became well aware, if they hadn't before, that Hartenstein accepted nothing less than perfection. They operated without lights; water was allowed in through a breach; they experienced engine failures; they had pump failures; they simulated diving and surfacing control loss. Every battle action that a submarine could expect was practiced over and over. Often the crew did not know whether it was real or another drill. More often the crew grumbled about "Crazy Dog" Hartenstein.

The officers were experienced. All were not steeped in submarine service, but were qualified men with interesting backgrounds. Lt. Just joined the German Luftwaffe in 1936, and before entering the submarine service in 1941 had flown 160 raids over the British Isles. Von dem Borne, Berlin-born son of a World War I German vice admiral

and chief of staff, had been on mine laying ships and destroyers before he was assigned to the U-156. His mine laying sallies took him around the Shetland Islands and into the mouth of the River Thames.

By mid-December, 1941, Hartenstein concluded that he had a crew and a ship that could withstand the rigors of a minor patrol. Christmas Eve, the U-156 slid away from her berth in Kiel and travelled northwest through the Kiel Canal to the North Sea. Hartenstein's orders were to proceed up the Skagerrak to the vicinity of Larvik, a Norwegian seaport, and engage British movements. Stormy seas precluded offensive action. Hartenstein's annoyance at not being able to strike Allied craft flushed full within him. He could not accept with indifference worthless ventures or endeavors. The commander stepped up operational training lest inactivity induce complacency. He still had a long patrol ahead.

North through the Atlantic Ocean plowed the U-156. The seas were rough and mines were always present. The submarine travelled wide around northern Scotland to the Rockhall Banks, west of Ireland. The trip was a frigid one. The boat was heated by a central heating system which circulated water from its engines' water cooling assembly. But it gave warmth only when the submarine was running at high speeds. The turbulent North Atlantic held the U-boat far below her surface cruising speed of 18.3 knots. There existed an electric heating system, but it consumed a great deal of current. It was rarely used. The crew fortified themselves with double heavy underwear, woolen poolovers, heavy winter uniforms and leather jackets. All were kept on in bed.

West of Ireland, the U-156 dropped off two floating weather buoys. The high seas and cumbersomeness of the buoys made the laying difficult, but they had to be positioned. These buoys and many others planted by the German Navy and Luftwaffe relayed valuable weather information to meteorologists in Germany. Predominate weather — the prevailing westerlies — moves across the North Atlantic and the British Isles to Germany. Knowing what weather was coming their direction gave the Germans information invaluable to their military planning. The U-156 planted two. Both were approximately forty-nine feet long including a twenty-two-foot antenna. They bobbed in the water and were anchored much like a marker buoy. Periodically, coded signals were sent by these buoys indicating the air temperature, wind velocity, water speed, barometer readings and atmospheric humidity recorded by the instruments in the buoys. They had been stored in the watertight torpedo compartment on the submarine's deck.

The U-156 sailed down the west coast of Ireland and made for France. Jan. 8, 1942, the submarine tied up in Lorient Harbor on the northwest coast of occupied France. A frigid fifteen-day journey without engaging the enemy and two weather buoys placed constituted the first patrol.

Lieutenants Paul Just and Dietrich A. von dem Borne stood on the slither of pier that extended into Lorient Harbor. Secured alongside was the long, grey form of a submarine. The red and black swastika above the conning tower whipped in the cold January air. The two officers and puzzled crew members silently wondered where their next patrol would take them. The huge supply of commissaries and tropical gear being loaded aboard their boat stirred their curiosity. Summer clothing, they agreed, was certainly different from the gear used on the patrol they had just completed.

Lt. Just and Von dem Borne hadn't received the slightest inkling from Hartenstein where their next patrol would take them. Two aspects of the future were obvious to them as they gazed at the enormity of the supplies stacked on the Lorient pier. The patrol would be a long one, and it would be in warm latitudes. The prospect of warm weather reduced the sting of the cold winds that laced the French harbor. Von dem Borne casually guessed the patrol would be around the tip of South Africa to the Indian Ocean.

Preparations for the long journey took eleven days. The men pondered over the placement of the huge quantities of food, clothing and arms. The U-156 was only 252 feet long and twenty-two feet at its greatest width. At its highest point it was thirty-one feet. Each of the forty-eight men aboard the U-156, with the possible exception of Hartenstein, who always was positively sure about such things, soon found out where all the supplies were to be stowed. Every possible nook and cranny was utilized. Boxes full of eggs were stacked on tables; in the passageways hammocks were strung full of bread and lemons, lockers the length of the boat were jammed with foodstuffs in jars and cans; the toilet in the crews quarters was shut off and used as a locker for canned food, and a huge crate of potatoes was plopped squarely in the middle of the control room. Nine torpedoes were strapped under bunks, six more were placed in the U-boat's tubes, and ten were secured in the watertight compartment on the deck.

Jan. 19, 1942, the U-156 left Lorient, France.

The submarine headed southwest, and when she sailed past the Azores the crew assumed their waters of operation would be off the coast of South America. Crossing the Atlantic afforded the crew some warm, leisure hours. Breaks in watches and training were used to sun bathe on the deck, fish, play cards and chess and listen to the radio. It also gave the men ample time to care for their persons. Again representative of Hartenstein's personal characteristics, he wanted his men to shower daily at dusk. A shower was rigged on the deck and another in the engine room. Under no circumstances would the U-boat commander condone beards of more than forty-eight hours' growth. There was nothing slovenly about Hartenstein, or the boat and crew under his command.

But while he was impeccable in his person and operated with thoroughness and efficiency, his men had come, by now, to respect his energies, abilities and consideration for others. On this the U-156's first major patrol, Hartenstein had molded a green crew into a cohesive combatant unit. The camaraderie ran high. In respect for the likes and dislikes of forty-eight men, Hartenstein permitted the men to vote on meals desired. The majority ruled. The option tended to lessen the gripes about a subject that was universally criticized in the military. The officers and non-commissioned officers preferred tuna fish in oil for breakfast. The enlisted men liked marmalade and wurst better.

Quite often the crew of the U-156 had fried flying fish for breakfast. Not only was the fish a delightful respite from the normal fare, but catching them was an equally delightful diversion. Deck watches competed with each other on the number of catches, and, of course, the winning group shared a kitty contributed to by the others. The record for a twenty-four-hour period was sixty fish.

The U-156's two Diesels, which were capable of generating 2500 horsepower each, pushed the German boat past the north coast of Guadeloupe Feb. 10. The crew knew then that the Caribbean would be their hunting grounds. They did not know, however, whom was to be hunted or exactly where.

Three days later, heading south, Curaçao came up on the horizon. Hartenstein addressed the crew. He told them the U-156 was part of the Neuland Group assigned to attack the Aruba and Curaçao refineries and engage the tankers between the Netherlands Antilles and Lake Maracaibo. Others in the group were Kapitanleutnant Muller-Stockman's U-67, Kapitanleutnant Albrecht Achilles' U-161, and Kapitanleutnant Jurgen Rosenstiel's U-502. The U-156 had been assigned the Aruba refinery and tankers at its shore. The attack would be launched

during the morning dark hours of Feb. 16.

Excitement raced through the ship. The operations inculcated on the crew caused individuals to involuntarily review order of battle and equipment readiness. They were ready and eager. At 1830, Feb. 13, the U-156 surfaced and steered for the Colorado Point light. The submarine proceeded around the Point and at 2030 moved past the refinery. Off the coast one mile, Hartenstein and his officers noted that "the refinery was well lighted, four large tankers were in port and three were at roadstead, and traffic also moved at night." Satisfied with his first look Hartenstein increased his boat's speed and continued along the coast to Oranjestad. He dived his boat and went into the mouth of the harbor, but there was little to be seen. Early morning air activity from Princess Beatrix Airport, which Hartenstein logged as two to four two-motored airplanes, caused the U-156 to submerge before detection. The submarine remained submerged off the northwest coast of Aruba until dusk Feb. 14.

Surfaced again under cloudy skies, the submarine sailed into the tanker route between the Antilles and the lake. Hartenstein and crew spotted tanker silhouettes, and practiced attack maneuvers on the unsuspecting lakers. None was fired at; the primary objective was the refinery. Their practice completed to Hartenstein's satisfaction, the boat moved back to Aruba. Here it submerged and moved up to the mouth of San Nicolas Harbor where her commander noted "considerable activity, harbor well occupied." The U-156 moved off toward Oranjestad.

At 0610, Feb. 15, Hartenstein's procedure orders were changed. The commander correctly assumed that the German high command had been rankled by disagreement. The countermanding official message to all Western Hemisphere submarines was:

- 1) the principal assignment is to attack ship's targets;
- 2) if this attack is successful, then artillery attack against land targets can be made on the morning of Western Hemisphere time should opportunity for this be favorable; and
- 3) when no ship targets are encountered, artillery attack against land targets may be made toward evening of Western Hemisphere time.

Admiral Karl Donitz's view of the Aruba operation, with which Admiral Erich Raeder took strong exception, was that the initial shelling of the refinery and tanks with deck guns would destroy the element of surprise needed for a successful attack on the almost irreplaceable lake tankers. Donitz succeeded Raeder as commander in chief of the Reich Navy in January, 1943.

The U-156 remained just below the surface most of Feb. 15 observing, from its position less than two miles off Seroe Colorado, the activity in the refinery and the harbor. The crew's greatest bother was keeping their vessel from being discovered by fishing boats. Shortly after nightfall the U-156 surfaced and almost ran into a patrol boat. Von dem Borne, who had the watch, ordered her hard over and avoided the boat. Luck ran with the U-156 at that moment; it was never seen.

On the surface outside the refinery, the crew scrambled to the deck and marvelled at the light and the activity. They had been living and operating in a blacked-out Europe for over two years, and the lights of the refinery and towns and cars and the homes in Seroe Colorado were sensational. Von dem Borne, in addition to having the midnight to 0400 watch, was also artillery officer. He supervised his crew in preparing the 10.5 cm and the 3.7 cm cannons and the 2 cm anti-aircraft gun. Lt. Just, the first watch officer, and his crew readied the torpedoes. It was now a matter of time; the U-156 and crew were ready to strike.

At 0131, Feb. 16 — it was 0801 Berlin time — the U-156 fired its first torpedo. Precisely 48.5 seconds later the explosive plowed into the side of the Pedernales and turned the laker into an inferno. At 0133, a second torpedo from the bow tubes of the U-156 sank the Oranje-stad.

Hartenstein ordered the submarine ahead in the direction of the harbor, then stopped three-quarters of a mile off the reef. The artillery was readied. The command to fire at 0141 was followed by a deafening roar that rocked the entire boat. Seaman Businger lay motionless on the deck. Von dem Borne sat stunned propped against the base of the conning tower where he had been slammed by the force of the explosion. The other gun crews continued their fire until Hartenstein halted their action when no results were apparent. The infuriated commander ordered the boat out of the area, then charged along the deck to find out what had happened to the shattered 10.5 cm cannon, the big gun he was sure would have produced results. He was given the answer.

His crewmen were ready and eager, but at the moment of action they were over eager. They had failed to remove the cannon's muzzle plug, which keeps water out of the barrel when submerged, and the shell exploded at the barrel's tip. In view of the exploded gun, what would have transpired Feb. 16, 1942, at Lago if artillery had remained first in battle procedure can only be left to conjecture.

The U-156 steamed along the surface to Oranjestad

where three torpedoes were fired at the Arkansas at Eagle Pier. One rammed the gas free tanker and she suffered only the force of the explosion; the second was never found, and the third ground to halt on the beach. It exploded and killed four demolition men who attempted to disarm it the next day.

The Lago lake tanker Pedernales was the first. She was the first lake tanker to be torpedoed; she was the first ship to be struck by the enemy in the Netherlands Antilles-Lake Maracaibo area; she was the first target of the U-156's first Caribbean patrol, and hers was the explosion that knocked Aruba's front door off its hinges and let in the horror of war.

The Pedernales was one of more than two dozen tiny, shallow-draft lake tankers owned by Lago which tirelessly churned back and forth between Aruba and Lake Maracaibo hauling crude to the Lago Refinery, riding in ballast to the lake. They were, in a way, specialty ships. They had a specific assignment which made them indispensable. Their average capacity was about 28,000 barrels, and their draft was shallow enough to enable them to clear at high tide the sandbar that closed the mouth of Lake Maracaibo. That was during the era before the bar was lowered and the chore of constant dredging initiated to keep the channel deep enough to accommodate ocean tankers.

The Pedernales was loaded with crude oil when she anchored off the coral reef that fronts Seroe Colorado. Herbert McCall, the tanker's master, was asleep in his quarters. He was brusquely roused from his slumber at 0131 by a dull report that reverberated through the length of the ship. The captain was blinded by flames that set his bedroom ablaze. Out on the ship's deck he saw that her back had been broken by the explosion. He groped his way to the port quarter which was high out of the water and not burning. The Pedernales captain left his ill-fated ship with a small cluster of his men in the only lifeboat that was able to be lowered.

The lifeboat with men injured and burned, some badly, drifted toward Oranjestad. They were later discovered and towed to shore. The men in the lifeboat constituted the majority of the Pedernales' eighteen survivors. Eight were lost.

The tanker survived. Charred, twisted and crumpled she remained afloat. She drifted from the location where she was torpedoed and took much of her fire with her. Later in the morning the fire that earlier had enveloped her burnt itself out. Tugs took the derelict in tow and

muscled her aground near Oranjestad. Shipyard crews cut the beached hulk in two. The bow and stern, then, were towed separately back to Lago's shipyard. The two pieces were fitted together and the stubby Pedernales, 124 feet shorter than she was the night before Feb. 16, set sail for the United States. There the little laker was again cut in half, rebuilt and returned to service. Included in her wartime action was the African campaign.

The second officer burst into the captain's quarters and roused Herbert Morgan, master of the lake tanker Oranjestad, from sleep. He excitedly told him the Pedernales was afire. Morgan's reply was immediate and terse: "Prepare to weigh anchor."

Morgan quickly drew on his trousers and raced out of his cabin. When he reached the ship's lower bridge he was blinded by a flash. His ship had been torpedoed at precisely 0133, Feb. 16. The ship listed immediately and fire consumed the entire vessel. Her back had been broken and she started to sink. Morgan returned to his cabin to get his life jacket. He scrambled to the ship's starboard side and was flung back by a sheet of flame. He attempted to cross the ship but fell and was pitched back to the flaming starboard quarters. The fall fractured his ribs, but desperation overrode any pain. With three mates he made his way to the bow of the ruptured ship.

The four men huddled together on a small section of the bow that had not caught fire. The men signalled for help but were never recognized. The Oranjestad settled gradually. About an hour after she was hit, the Oranjestad slipped beneath the water's surface. The captain and his associates were washed off their perch. All had life-jackets except the second officer, who was lost. The men were retrieved from the oily sea about 0330 by a Dutch patrol boat.

Out of every tragedy and emergency arises accounts of devotion and bravery. Aboard the Oranjestad were two men who had sailed together for years. They were from the same island and had lived much of their childhood together. Theirs was a tight bond of friendship held fast by their constant and compatible association aboard the Oranjestad.

At 0131, Feb. 16, one was in the crew's quarters and the other was on watch in the engine room. The force of the torpedo's explosion crashed men into bulkheads and dashed them to the deck. The friend in the crew's quarters was smashed into a bunk frame. In the confusion that ensued throughout the ship and with head reeling from the blow, he didn't know what had happened. He, like

many others, gave no thought to enemy action, but figured that the tanker's petroleum cargo had been ignited through mishap.

The details of what happened did not interest him at all. He knew the ship had been hurt; she was aflame, and his friend was somewhere below deck. Other crew members stumbled by in desperate efforts to leave the inferno that once had served as their place of work and sea-going home. He inquired about his friend, but none had seen him. With little regard for himself he fought through smoke, flame and oil-slick decks in an effort to get to the location in the engine room where he was sure his friend was either trapped or injured. Flames, mounted like riders on black, ugly steeds of hot oil, rolled through torpedo-ruptured seams. He disappeared inside the ship to save his friend. He never returned from his chosen course.

This man and the man he went to save were among the fifteen lost aboard the Oranjestad. Ten survived. They, as did many others that night, swam ashore or were fortunate enough to be picked up by small craft. In addition to Dutch patrol boats, the Marine Department dispatched every small vessel it had to search for survivors. Joe Fernando, one of Lago's present tugboat captains, took the tug Standard out and rescued three men. Aboard the net tender, Aruba, R. N. Wilkie of the Marine Department looked for crewmen of the Pedernales and the Oranjestad.

William van Putten had come to Aruba from St. Eustatius. He joined the lake fleet in 1930, and in eleven years of tanker shuttling between San Nicolas Harbor and Lake Maracaibo had never seen or experienced major incident at sea. He enjoyed sea life, and found his fireman duties aboard the Pedernales satisfying. The short, stocky seaman especially enjoyed the Caribbean nights. This night, shortly after 1 a.m., Feb. 16, was a typically bright, starry night. The serenity of the moment caused Van Putten to pause on the starboard deck; the bright moon illuminated his view of quiet, untelling waters.

It had been an uneventful trip, this last one, from the lake to Aruba. Now the Pedernales squatted low in the water, her tanks weighted by a capacity load of crude oil, patiently waiting at anchor outside the refinery's sea terminal. Soon a berth would be available in San Nicolas Harbor and she would ease away from her roadstead.

But there were duties to be performed in the engine room and Van Putten turned to go below shrugging off

the bliss that had, with night's inducement, enveloped him. He never entered the hatchway. Without the slightest warning and without the slightest realization of what had happened, Van Putten's and the Pedernales' serenity exploded in flame, twisted steel and burning oil. The Pedernales' fireman didn't know it then, but the first torpedo fired by U-156 had hit its mark. The violence of the eruption spun Van Putten to the deck. He tried to regain his footing but fell again on a deck covered with oil and fire and canted at a severe angle. The explosion ripped the Pedernales amidships and sprung her bow and stern upward like a warped board. She listed heavily to starboard.

On hands and knees, his right arm and back covered with searing oil and flame, Van Putten searched the ship's stern for an avenue of escape. In that moment he saw a phosphorescent blur streak through the water into the side of the Oranjestad. Another explosion rent the night and the tiny tanker at anchor astern of the Pedernales buckled and spewed flaming oil from its tanks. Motivated by fear and subsistence, Van Putten clambered to the port side of the burning ship. How, he remembers not, and when he reached the port lifeboat station frenzied crewmen were chopping the only usable lifeboat free of its moorings. He flung himself into the boat as it crashed over the side. It knifed crazily into the water bow first.

Van Putten clung desperately to the lifeboat; others climbed in and pulled the injured out of the water. The lifeboat carried its burned and half-burned survivors clear of the twisted hulk that once was the Pedernales. The little band huddled in the boat and tried to bring solace to each other and particularly to the two gravely injured seamen in their midst. It was a tragic night and the horror dragged on hour after hour. Men, whose injuries needed ministering, drifted aimlessly in a lifeboat without means of propulsion — the oars had slipped away when the life craft was dumped over the Pedernales' side.

The drifting lifeboat was sighted off Oranjestad at daybreak and towed to shore by a fishing boat. The badly burned chief steward died of burns in the life boat. The third engineer died moments after his arrival at San Pedro Hospital. Van Putten and the others were treated and transferred to Lago Hospital. Not long after, Van Putten's burns healed without scarring and he returned to the shuttle. His next ship was the Quirequire; but it's the Pedernales he never forgets. Well he remembers the fear — ever present during the remaining years of the war — that his tanker would be the object of another U-boat attack.

He left the lake fleet in 1948, and today is a foreman for one of Lago's paint contractors.

Francisco G. Thomas was a shipmate of Van Putten's on the Pedernales. He, too, drifted in the lifeboat, but more fortunate than some others, had evacuated his crew's quarters and the burning ship unscathed. He was asleep when it happened. Relieved of his quartermaster duties earlier in the evening when the tanker had been secured at her roadstead, he tumbled into bed. The explosion's roar and surge through the ship woke Thomas. His scramble to the deck was instinctive. At the time of the detonation, he had no idea of what had happened and was not going to pause to ponder, either. His only desire was to get off the ship. The roll of the tanker tossed him to the deck. He experienced no flames, just oil which ran through the passageways. Awkwardly, but as speedily as the tilted, oiled deck would allow, Thomas made his way to the port lifeboat station.

As Thomas reached the port stern quarter, he saw the Oranjestad explode into a ball of flame. Fear moved in on him. He realized then that the war in Europe and the Atlantic had moved into the Caribbean.

Thomas returned to his home in Bonaire after the Pedernales sinking. He had been in Lago's lake fleet since 1936 and planned to return in a week or so. He did and his next ship was the Andino. Thomas and the ships on which he served were never molested by the enemy again. In fact, he never saw another ship hit during his shuttles between Aruba and the lake plus one long trip his ship made as part of a huge convoy to the United States.

Thomas left the lake fleet in 1956, but still goes to sea. Whenever he has the opportunity, he signs aboard the tankers on the lake run. His last was a Norwegian ship. When the ship's charter ends, he comes ashore and waits for another.

The Andino nearly got itself in the middle of enemy action, though. The date was Feb. 15, 1942. The Andino, in the lake with a full load of crude destined for Aruba, had burned out her boilers. The Quirequire took her in tow and prepared for the long night trip across the lake's sandbar and thence to Aruba. As fate would have it, the preparation of the tow caused the two ships to miss the tide and they had to remain inside the lake until the next high tide which would occur during the morning of Feb. 16. The two ships never made the trip Feb. 16, however; they were detained inside the lake because of enemy action. Had the two ships not missed the tide, they would have been sitting ducks in the same general area



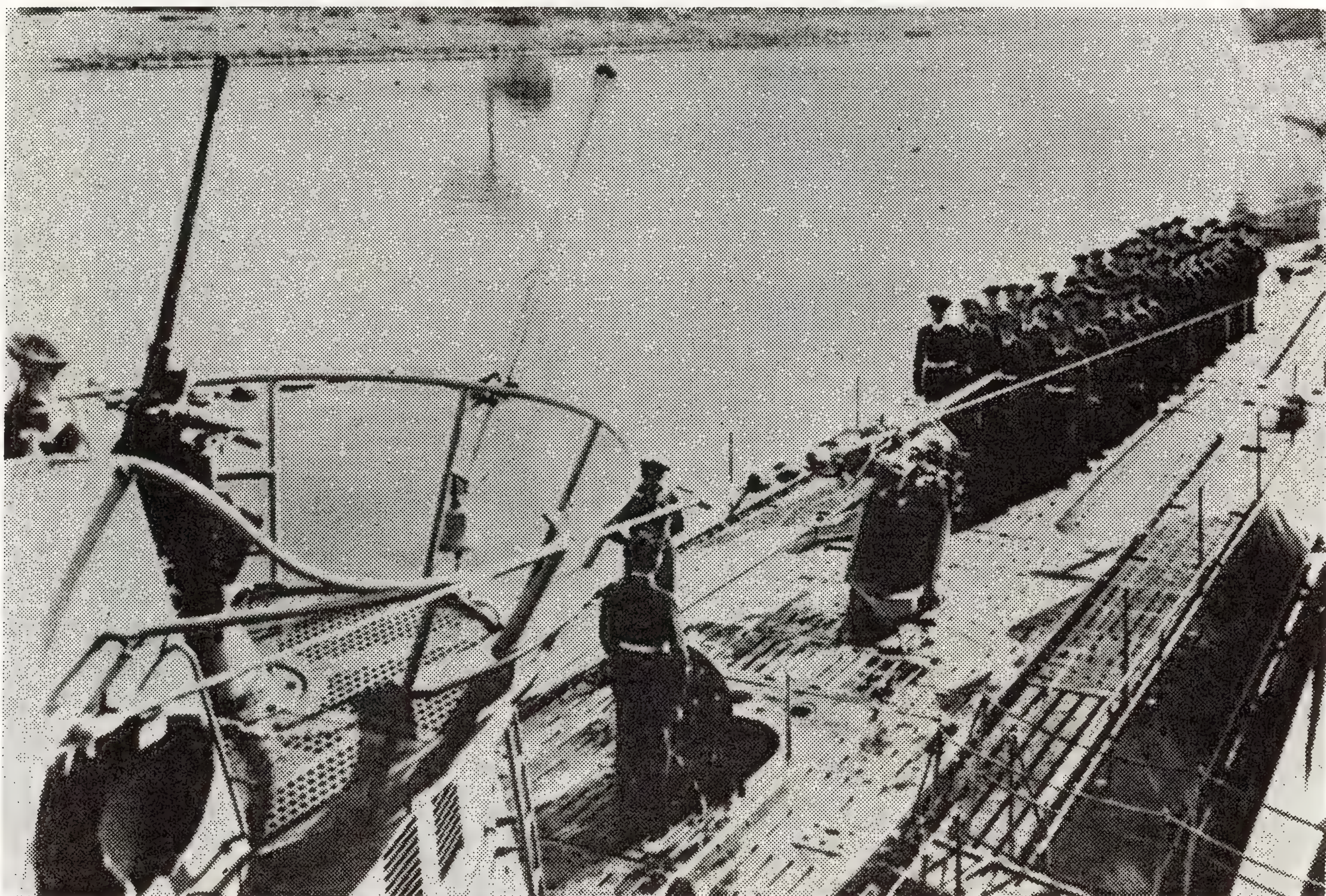
Kapitänleutnant Werner Hartenstein
Commander - U-boat 156



Leutnant Dietrich A. von dem Borne
Second Watch Officer - U-boat 156

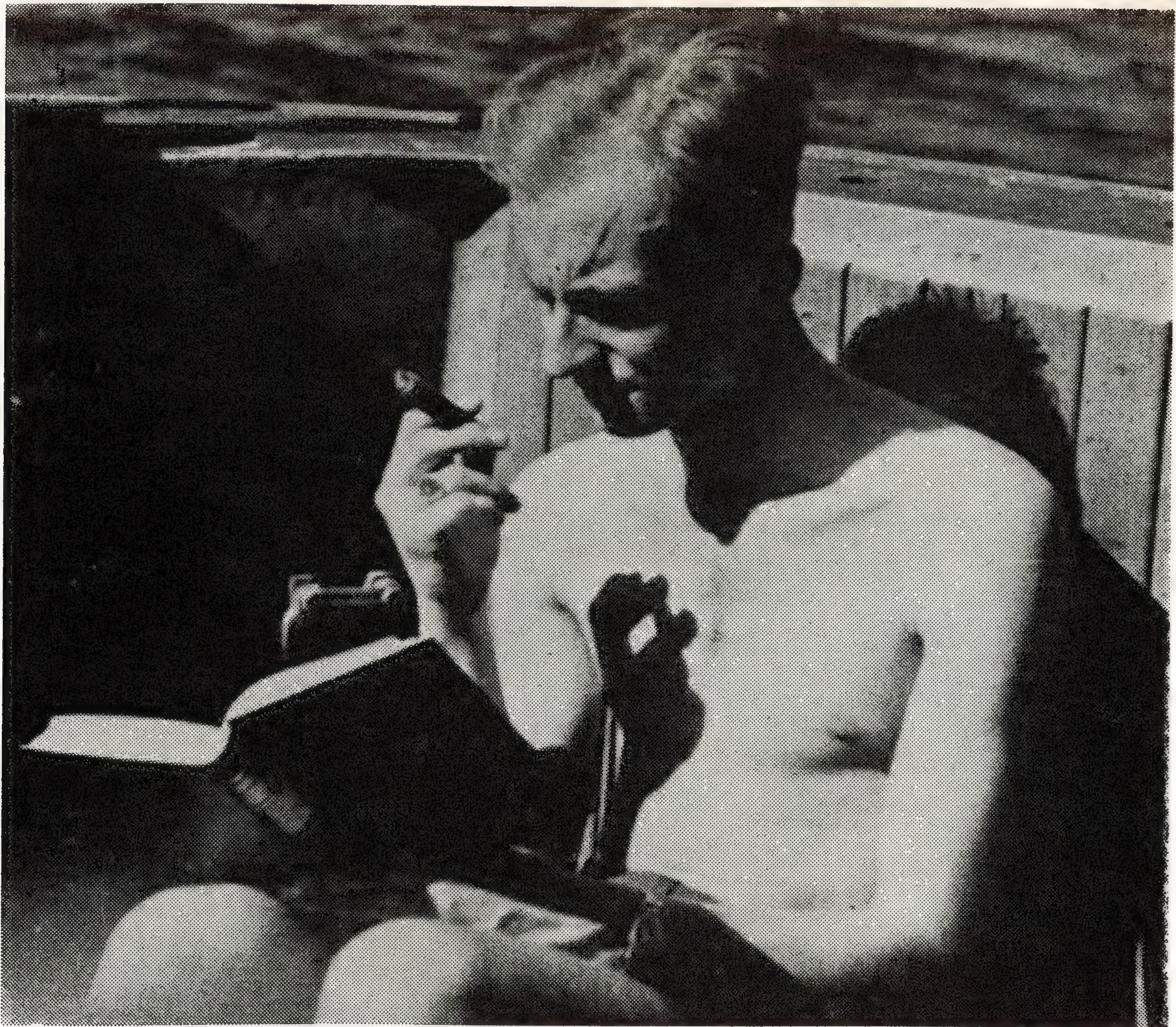


Kapitanleutnant Werner Hartenstein, in formal commissioning ceremonies, addressed his crew on the deck of the U-156. A member of the German navy since 1928, he was a well-decorated, energetic and strict officer.





The Nazi flag was raised above the conning tower during commissioning ceremonies of the U-156 Sept. 4, 1941. The boat, built in Bremen, began its patrols from Kiel.



Second Watch Officer D. A. von dem Borne, now a kapitanleutnant in the German Federal navy, was the artillery officer aboard the U-156. Shattered metal from the 10.5 gun exploded and ripped off his foot. The first patrol of the U-156 was through the North Sea and North Atlantic Ocean. Many of the men pictured on these pages were lost when the U-boat 156 was sunk.



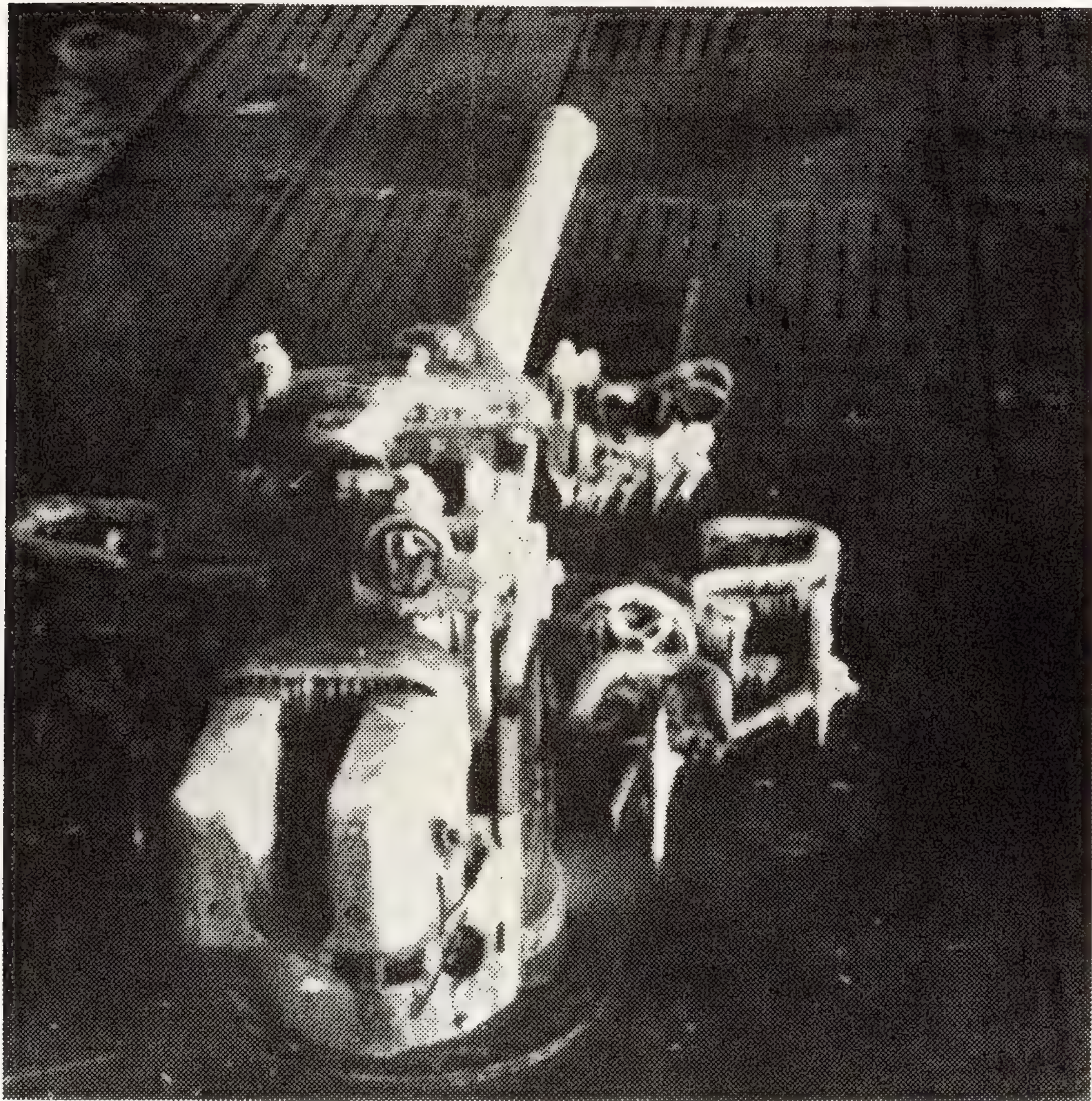


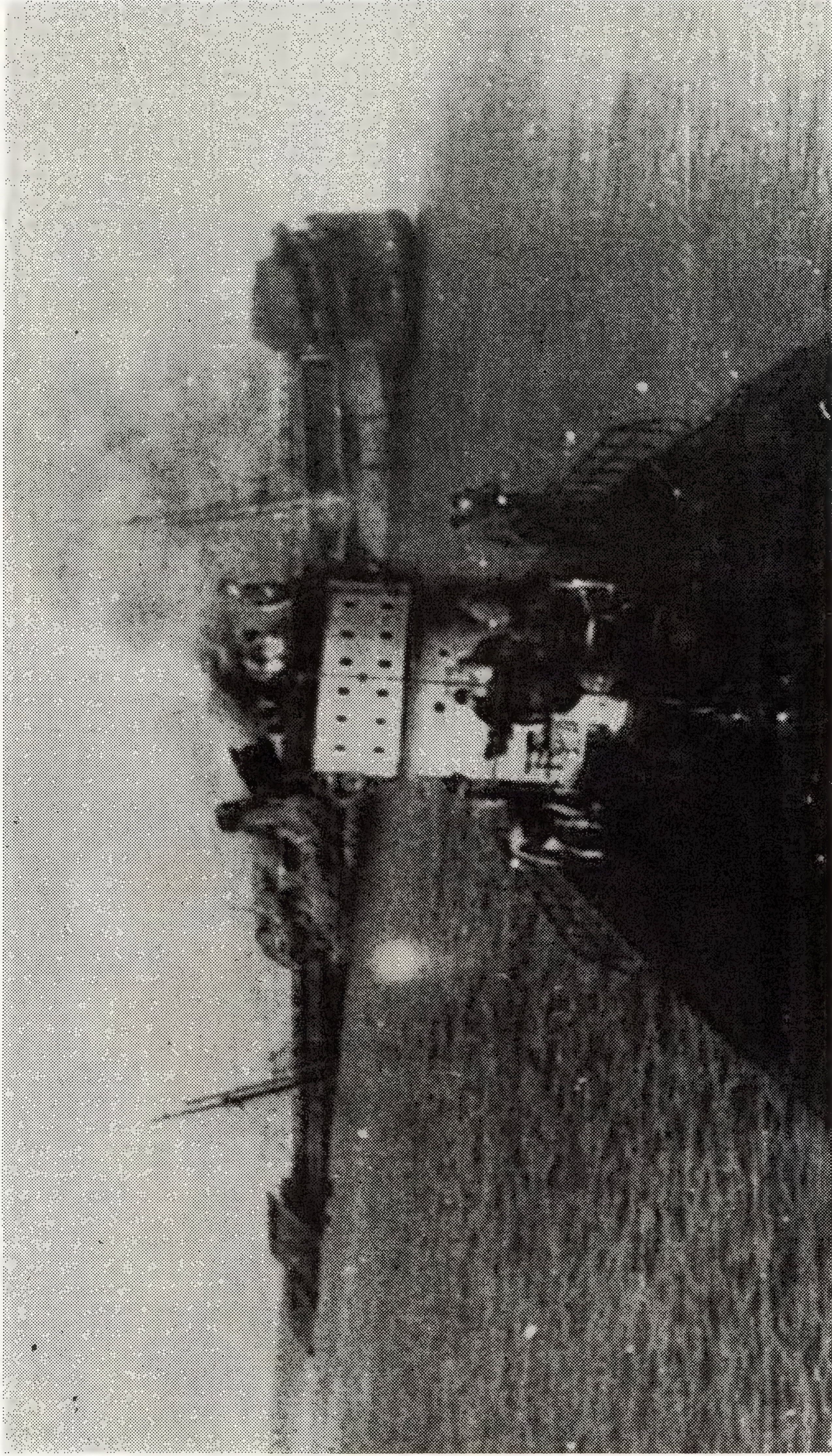
The crew had varied backgrounds. Hartenstein was an artillery officer, Von dem Borne served aboard destroyers, and Lt. Paul Just, second from left, was a Luftwaffe aviator. Kapitanleutnant Werner Hartenstein, below center, was a career officer. He was strict, skilled at the crafts of sea warfare, and an unrelenting taskmaster. He was a correct person and ran his ship accordingly.



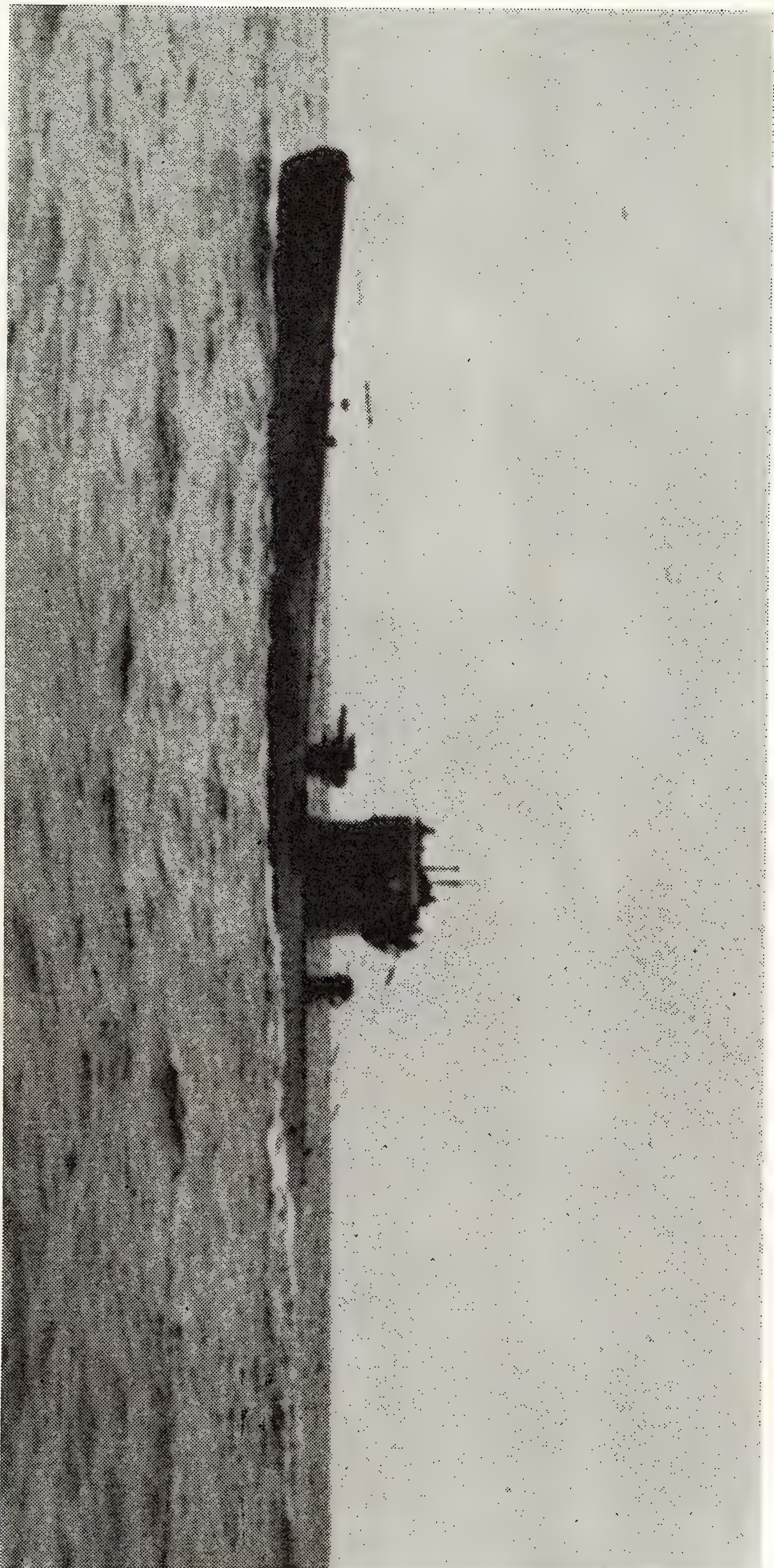


Deck armament comprised a 2 cm anti-aircraft gun, 3.7 and 10.5 cm cannons. The 10.5, which exploded, below is ice covered on a northern patrol.





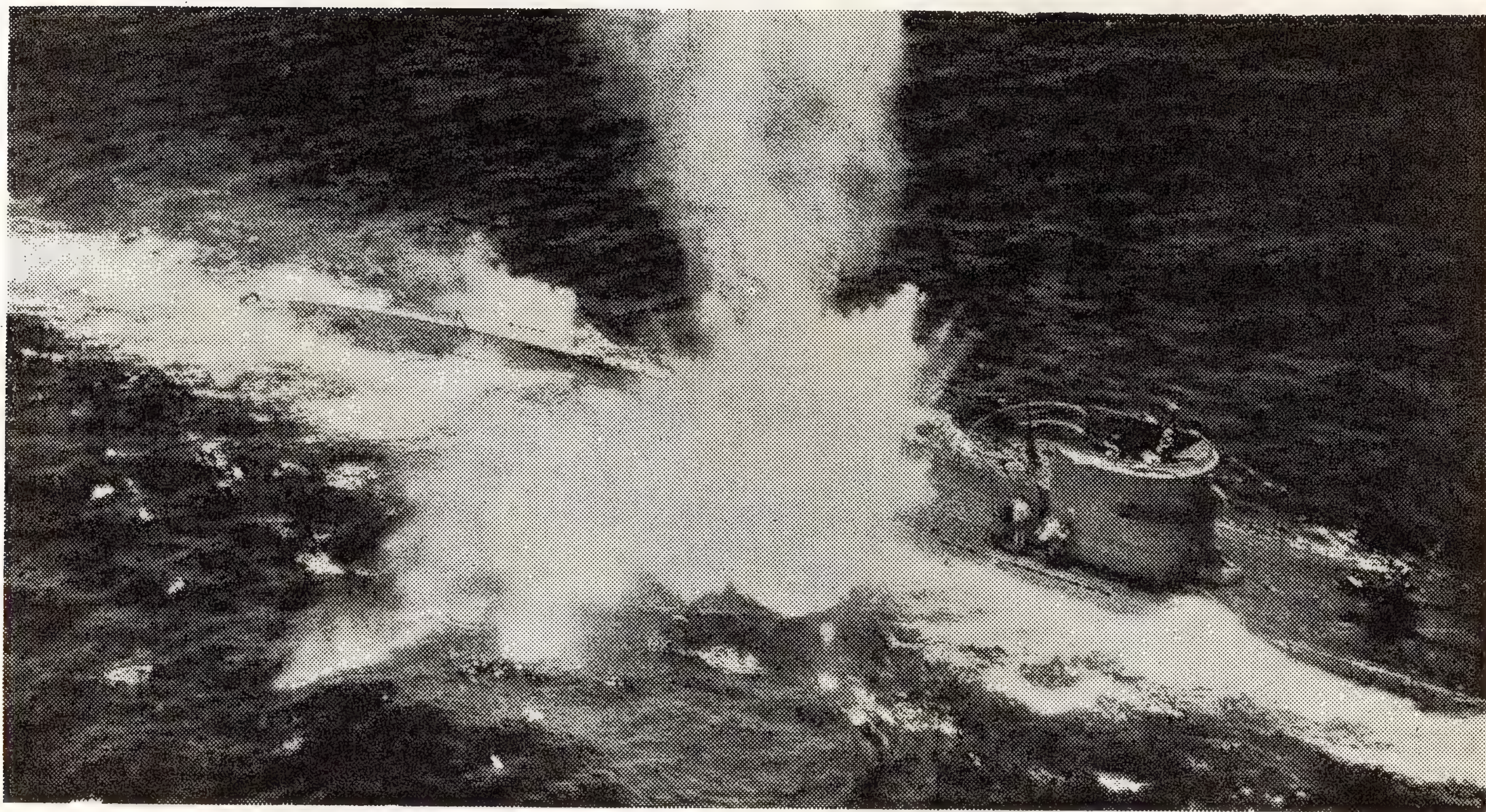
The U-156 and crew watch one of their Caribbean victims sink. The German submarine sank over 100,000 gross tons of Allied shipping during its year of silent, underwater hunting.



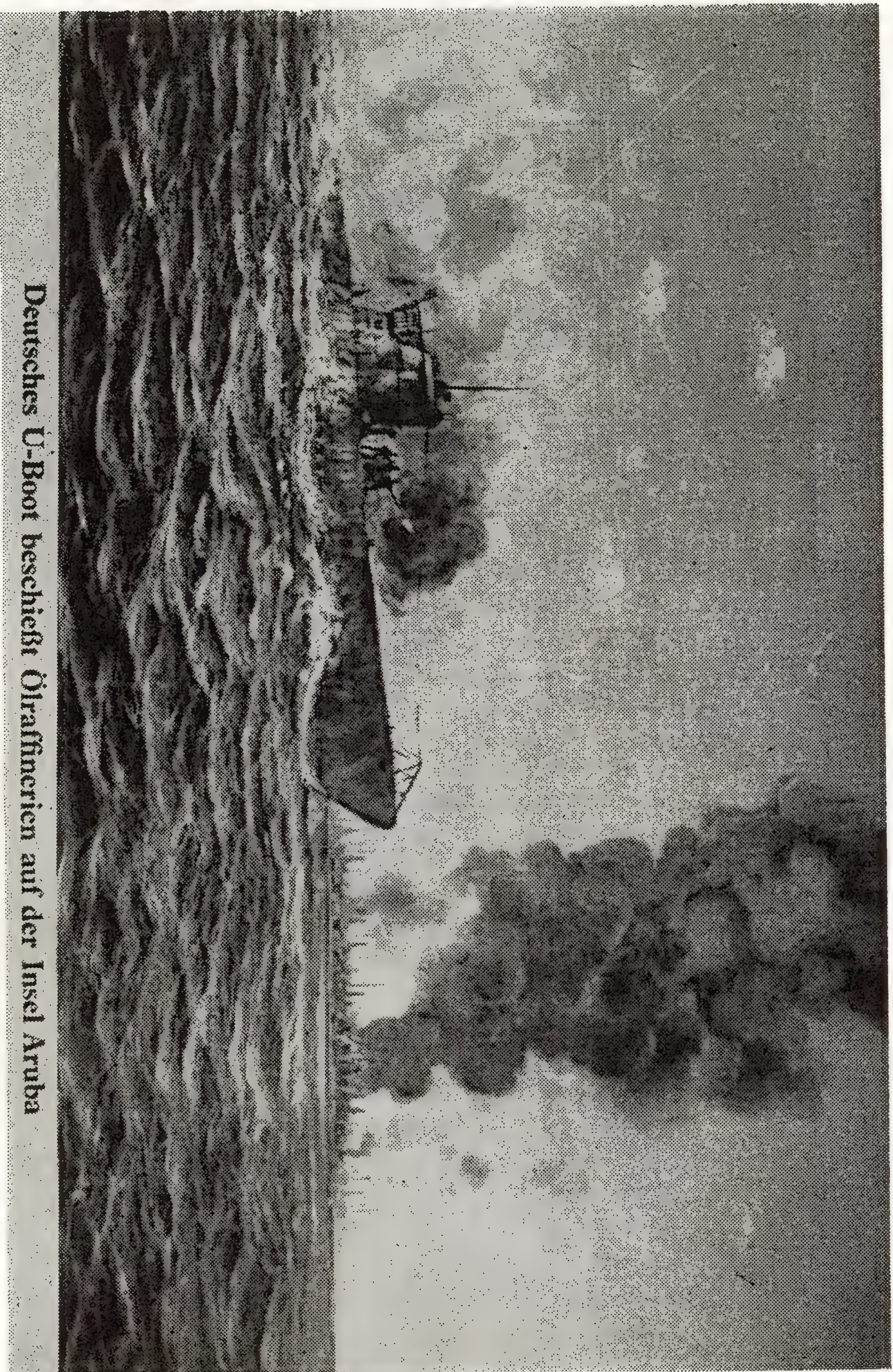
The U-156 was an IX-C class submarine. The boat carried 25 torpedoes, had a range of 11,000 miles, and cruising speeds of 18.3 knots surfaced and 7.3 knots submerged.



The gun crew of the 10.5 cm swing the bow cannon starboard during a practice session. This is the cannon that exploded Feb. 16 when the U-156 shelled the refinery.



Patrol bomber action, such as this, sank the U-156 March 8, 1943, 340 miles east of Barbados. In this exceptional U.S. Navy photograph taken from the attacking plane, a submarine, of the same class as the U-156, was bombed and sunk.



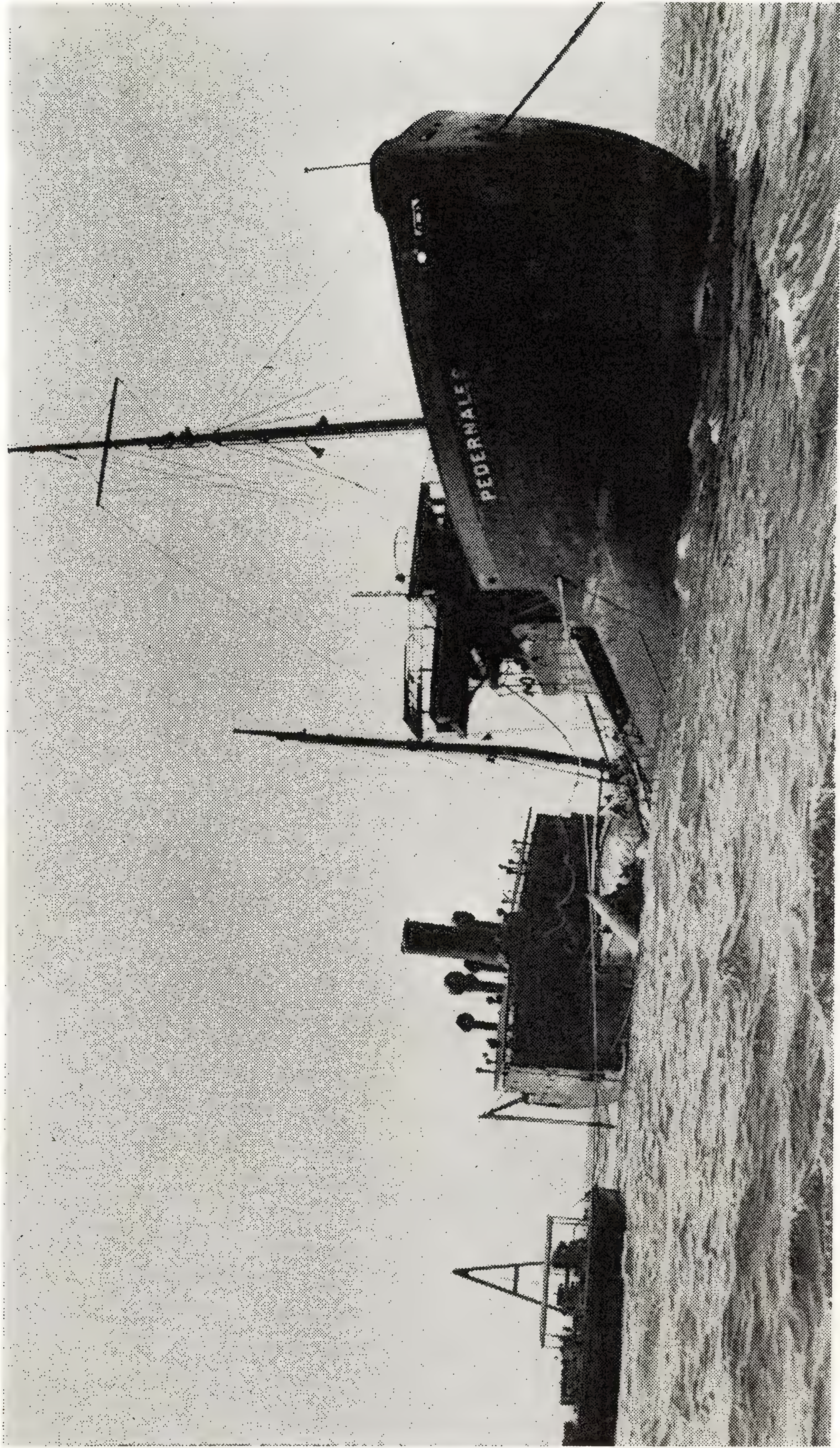
This, a propaganda poster done by a German artist in 1942, depicts the U-156 successfully shelling and setting afire the Lago Refinery. Untrue, of course, yet the poster undoubtedly received wide circulation and belief in Germany. A copy of the poster was found in an evacuated German schoolhouse by a United States Army soldier during the advance on Berlin in 1945.



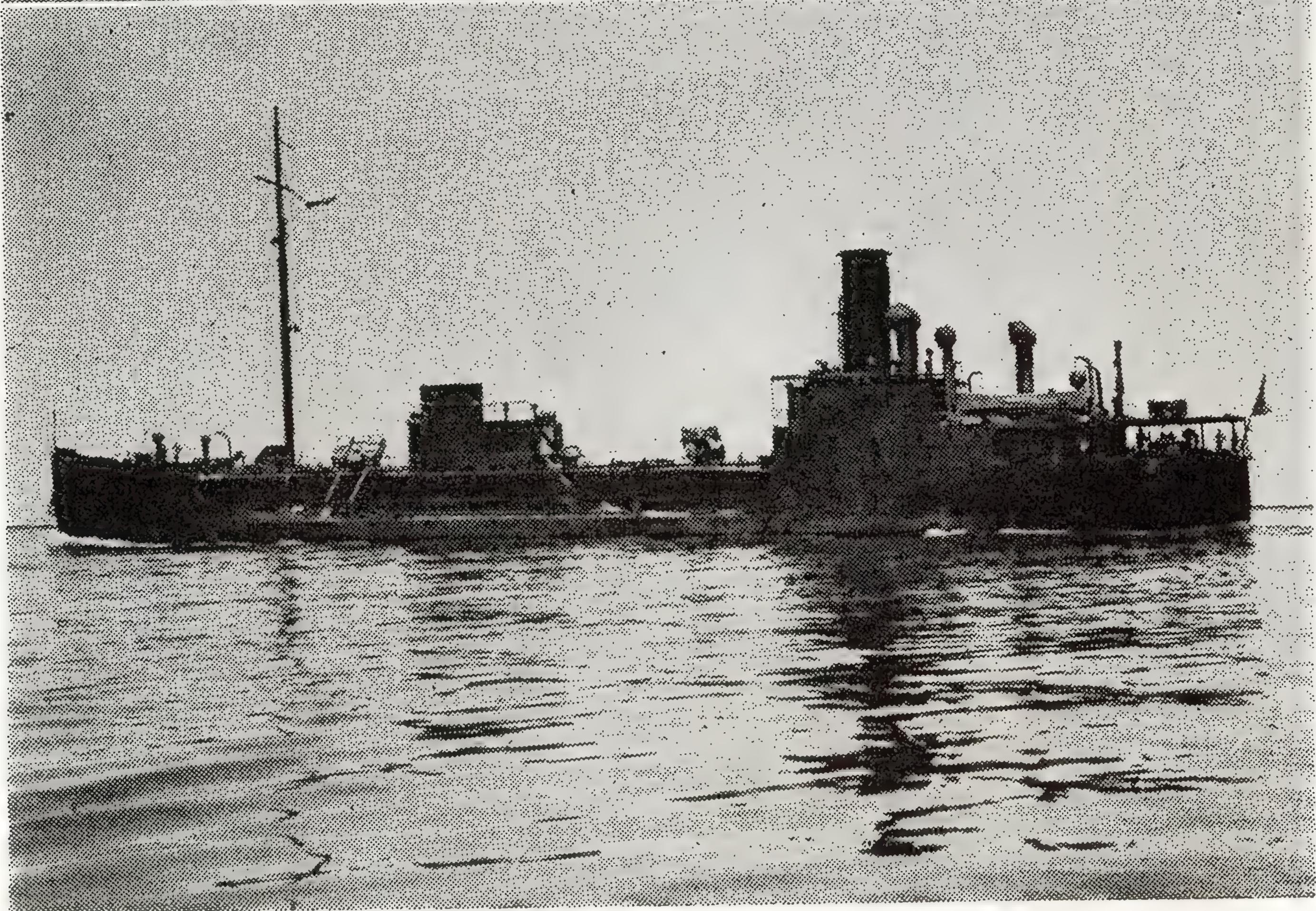
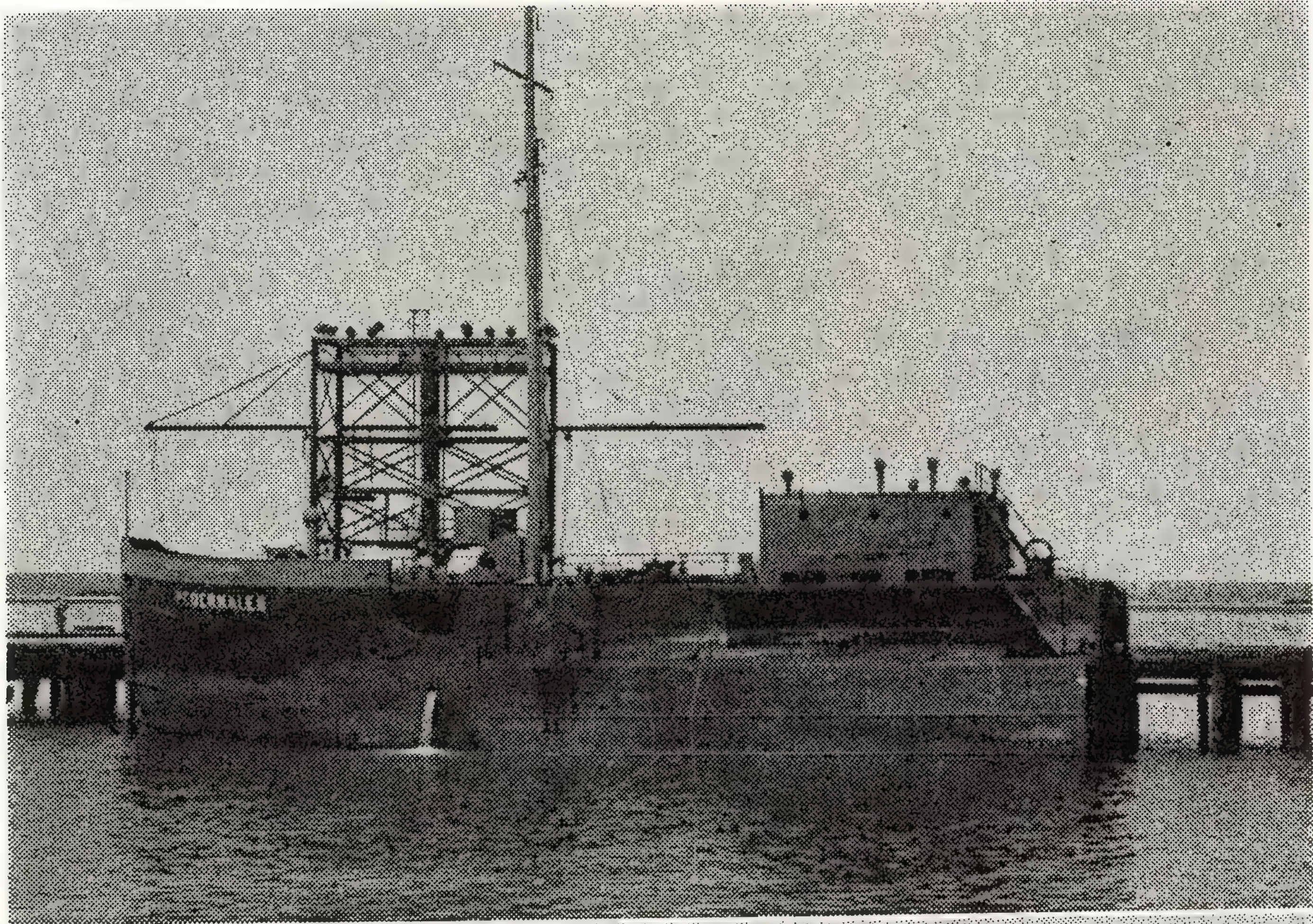
Burning oil from the Pedernales and Oranjestad rolled along the surface of water where the tankers had been hit by the first two torpedoes fired by the U-boat 156 in combat.



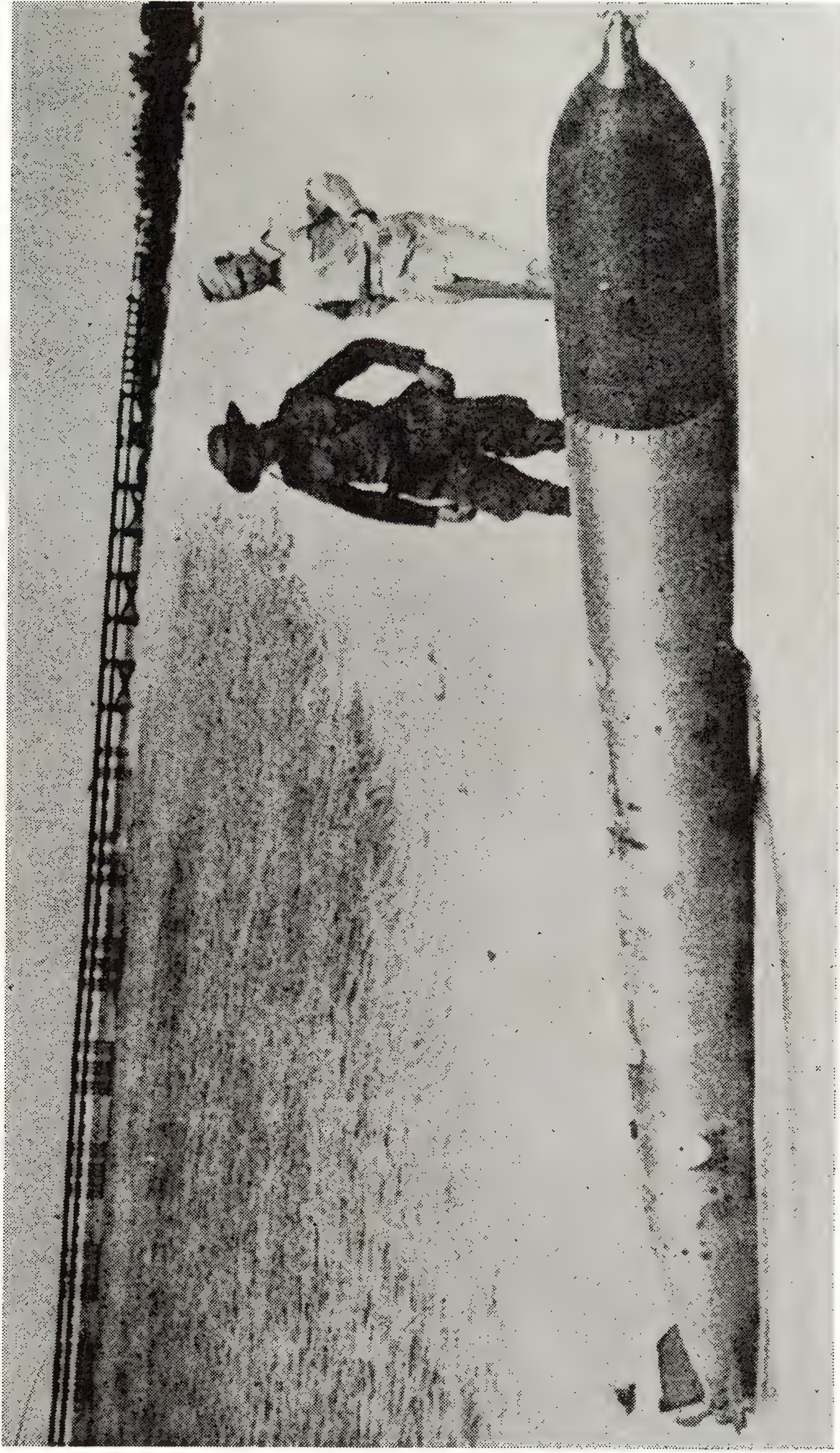
The first U-156 torpedo broke the Pedernales' back, set her afire, but never sank the laker.



The Pedernales was the first tanker hit by the U-156. Although she exploded and burned fiercely, she never foundered. Her charred hulk drifted toward Oranjestad where Lago tugs shoved her up on the beach the next day.



The Pedernales was cut in two. The bow and stern sections were floated to Lago where they were joined. A stubby Pedernales, 124 feet shorter, sailed to the States to be rebuilt.



The U-156 also fired at a tanker at Eagle Pier. One torpedo ended on the beach where it exploded and killed four demolition men who attempted to disarm the missile the next day.



One of the first enemy shells to strike the Western Hemisphere bounced off tank 112. Another went through a house north of the lower tank farm. The shelling injured no one. Page 15 of the U-boat 156 log records the Feb. 16 torpedo and artillery attack on Lago. Berlin time is used in log.

Datum	Wetter bei U-Boot, Wind, Meer, Sicht	Vorgang, Beobachtung, Entdeckung	Dortkommnisse
12.2.42	1220	Colorado 32°, 3 am ab	Getracht zur Beobachtung einleitet; Nikolasshove, Leichter Verkehr. Hofen aus Orient. Danach nach Osten abgewandt.
12.2.42	1240		2. Offizier einberufen: An Neuandorfer! 1.) Hauptaufgabe ist Angriff auf Schiffsziele 2.) sind solche Angriff erlaubt, so ist Artillerieeinheit gegen Landziele bereits am Morgen des Neulandtags frei, 7.11.42 Gelassenheit hier zu sein! 3.) kann keine Schiffsziele im Bereich sein Artillerieeinheit gegen Landziele ab Abend des Neulandtags abgebrochen.
16.2.42	1600	Neelberg 20°, 9 am ab	kurz
	1655	Neelberg 22°, 22,5 am ab 0 5.3000, 4, Bevölkerung, Sicht 12 am	aufgebrucht. auf Ost-Kurs umgeleitet.
	2000	Neelberg 69°, 27 am ab 0 5.3000, 4, leicht bew. Sicht 12 am	Kehrtrommel. Alt Gerinck 1.000 5.000 Ardu beobachtet.
	0400	Neelberg 72°, 21 am ab 0 5.3000, 4, leichte Wolken, Sicht 6 am	Wachmann beobachtet. 1.000 5.000 5.000 1.000 5.000 5.000 5.000 oder 1.1000 5.000 5.000 5.000 sich ab.
	0500	" 92°, 7, 6 am ab	
	0514		
	0725		
	0801	Colorado 59°, 2 am ab	<p>mit Ostkurs Grandjean abgewandt.</p> <p>Vor Grandjean, an der Bordier liegt ein beobachteter Tanker beim Laden. Nach Beobachtung weitergeleitet.</p> <p>Vor Nicolasshove. Mit 1.1.42 vor Anker liegende Tanker angelauten.</p> <p><u>Beobachtung auf Tanker.</u></p> <p>Detonation nach 45,5 Sec. Tanker brennt sofort. 1.000 t, Apo, 2,5, 40, 1-9, Treffer Mitte</p> <p><u>Überwasserbeobachtung auf Tanker.</u></p> <p>Detonation nach 22,2 sec. Tanker brennt sofort, 2700 t, Dto, 2,5, 30, E * 5, Treffer Mitte.</p> <p>Auf 300 Grad gesehen zur Artillerie gegen Artillerie klar. neuer eröffnet gegen Landziele! 10, 5, 1. Schuss hochexplodiert. 2 Schussverletzte. 3, 7, 16 Schuss. Meist in Ziel, da keine Beobachtung vorhanden.</p>
	0803		
	0806		
	0811		
	0812		

where U-boat torpedoes sent the San Nicolas, Tia Juana and Monagas to the bottom.

None of these lakers was sunk by Hartenstein but by others of the Neuland Group positioned along the Antilles-Lake Maracaibo route. In concert with Hartenstein, the others had been ordered to strike Feb. 16 shortly after U-156 initiated the operation.

Ermencio J. Semeleer, a five-year veteran of the lake fleet shuttle, stood in the middle of the engine room of the Tia Juana. He stood still and silent completely intent on the operation of the engines under his watch. His legs were spread slightly to absorb the roll of the heavily-laden laker as she plowed through choppy seas on her return voyage to Aruba. He folded his stocky arms across a broad chest and stared at the ship's clock. It was exactly 0230. The date was Feb. 16, 1942.

At that exact moment, an explosion sent Semeleer sprawling headfirst into a pump, over which hung the clock that recorded indelibly in the fireman's mind the time the U-boat torpedo ended the life of the Tia Juana.

His crash into the pump was absorbed by fending arms. He held on, and never lost his footing even as the ship heeled over sharply. There was no fire and no oil in the engine room, but the wrenching force of the explosion had created a hazard almost as great: jammed doors. Semeleer pulled his way across the engine room to an exit. As with others whom had been torpedoed, he did not know what had happened but instinctively knew he had to abandon ship. The door to escape wouldn't open. His trial was further complicated by the list of the ship which slid him away from the door.

To hold his balance was, alone, an almost unmanageable feat without the added task of forcing open the door. Semeleer exerted all the might and weight he could muster and somehow, miraculously perhaps, swung the jammed door enough to get his head through. He squashed the remainder of his body through the tiny opening.

On deck he was seized with not only the urgency of the situation, but the degree of his plight. He was high out of the water on the top side of a listing ship. The patch of deck he stood on was the only part of the ship not entirely enveloped in flame. A fellow crewman hung over the railing. He yelled to him, but the man did not respond. Semeleer grabbed the railing and pulled himself to the crewman. He shook the man. Still no response. A stunned Semeleer suddenly received the silent message of death. He turned away from the body and thought of himself. A lifeboat swung nearby, and he attempted to

lower it. The venture was hopeless. The angle of the list was so great it caused the loosened lifeboat to crash into the ship's funnel and then tumble into flaming oil.

Semeleer was not an adept swimmer and he feared the ocean, its size and, at that moment, its dark, ominous appearance. Fire was a greater fear. Semeleer, alone, afraid and without a life vest, lowered himself down a rope into the vastness of a dark, rough sea.

He had no true idea of how long he floundered about in the water trying to hold his head up. It didn't seem too long after he had left the ship that he felt a muffled concussion through the water as the Tia Juana's boilers exploded and the ship foundered. Still later he was exhausted and soaked with oil from a period of exposure that seemed an eternity. In one of those inexplicable quirks of fate and fortune, the solitary Semeleer, half-drowned and body leaded with fatigue, drifted into five other Tia Juana survivors, all supported by one life jacket. The others grabbed Semeleer and propped him up between them.

The watery entourage continued to drift. A tanker came into view, and slowed almost as if she were looking for survivors. Her crew humanely but unwisely cast a spotlight over the water. The men in the water identified the vessel as the Gulf boat, Monagas, and elatedly began to swim toward her. Semeleer refused to go. He had had his share of swimming for the night and didn't feel physically able to continue. The five left the life jacket with him and beat through the waves in the direction of the tanker.

The men quickly disappeared from Semeleer's view. He was alone again in the middle of the Caribbean. After an indefinable period of time — time had ceased to have meaning to Semeleer — the Monagas blew up in a sheet of flames. Another Nazi torpedo had scored a direct hit, which was officially recorded at 0330.

Almost as if there was comfort or security to be gained in moving away from an enemy target, Semeleer attempted to swim in the opposite direction from the burning Monagas. With the aid of the life vest it was a little easier to remain afloat. He moved his arms slowly, kicked his legs easily; his entire body ached with cold and exhaustion.

Another tanker appeared. There were bound to be many since this was the well-travelled route from Lake Maracaibo to the Netherlands Antilles. This sea action took place in an area roughly ten to fifteen miles in radius off Venezuela's Punta Macolla. The tanker Semeleer spotted appeared to be bearing down in the vicinity of the burning Monagas to investigate. She slowed to an extremely

cautious pace, and this undoubtedly contributed to Semeleer's rescue. Semeleer prayed that they would see him. But how? A lone figure in the water at dawn would be almost impossible to see. The bobbing man felt sure that the German submarine commanders would see the high-riding tanker. Semeleer was now well aware of the cause of the Tia Juana's and the Monagas's explosions.

Semeleer's good fortune remained with him. The Shell tanker Ramona's crew heard the explosion and saw the Monagas flash. The crew's first reaction was that one of the ship's boilers had blown. The Ramona slowed and proceeded cautiously in the direction of the distressed ship. The tanker's captain summoned all hands to the deck to watch for men in the water. One crewman spotted the lone Semeleer. The Shell tanker stopped and pulled him aboard. When asked what had happened, he shouted: "Torpedo! Torpedo!"

The Shell lake tanker Ramona rode light and high in the water on her return trip to the lake. Her crew went about their duties unconcerned with all but the proper operation of their ship. The trips back and forth between Curaçao and Lake Maracaibo were usually uneventful. Vicente G. Provence, Ramona boatswain, lolled about the railing shortly before relieving the watch at 0400. Not that it mattered to Provence or probably any crewmember since at sea days run into nights and nights into days without much note of differentiation, but this was Feb. 16.

The man he was to relieve told Provence there seemed to be untoward incidents about and wondered if some ships were in distress. Earlier, he related, he thought he saw flashes in the direction of the Aruba refinery; then later flashes along the lake route. His uneasiness seemed to drift through the Ramona's crew, and the men's consternation — over what they knew not — brought them to the ship's deck. It suddenly came upon them. They heard the explosion; they saw the flames. The tanker cruised in to assist. A man was sighted in the water. The captain of the Ramona ordered full astern to pick up the survivor. As the ship's forward motion decreased then stopped, a phosphorescent blur whipped past her bow.

Pulled out of the water and asked what had happened, the wet and oily figure inside the life jacket identified himself as a Tia Juana fireman and shouted: "Torpedo! Torpedo!"

The captain of Ramona screamed for full ahead. Simultaneous with the order was the realization of what had just knifed past his bow. The forward motion of the

Ramona was none too soon, and just enough. A second torpedo ripped the surface of the water off the ship's stern. Underway with all the speed her engines could generate, the Ramona captain employed zig-zag evasive maneuvers. He knew he had been sighted by one submarine, and he wasn't at all sure how much determination and vengeance had been incited by the U-boat commander's annoyance at having missed the Ramona twice.

At 0400, fear gripped the Ramona's crew when they heard the report of another explosion. No flame was readily visible. Fifteen minutes later, the crew heard a second explosion. The captain of the Ramona was struck with the cold realization that he was sailing his ship over waters that hid two, maybe more, enemy submarines.

The Ramona cut short her dash to the lake when planes appeared at dawn. Safe with aerial protection, the Ramona slowed again to continue her search for survivors. It was then the crew saw the tanker that had been hit twice. Ahead were the remains of the torpedoed lake tanker San Nicolas. She stood vertically, her stern on the bottom and her bow jutting through the water's surface in ugly defiance of her tormentor.

The crew of the Ramona sighted small knots of men; one group of six clung to the wreckage of a lifeboat and four others supported themselves on a capsized small boat. Of the ten only eight were pulled aboard the rescuing tanker. Two men slipped beneath the waves, their senses numbed by exhaustion with rescue arm's lengths away. One who was lost grasped a line from the Ramona, but his strength had ebbed during the ordeal and he was unable to hold it.

The Ramona and the Lago tanker Jamanota rescued eighteen San Nicolas crewmen. Seven were lost. Three were killed instantly when the first torpedo hit the engine room. The San Nicolas listed abruptly, but did not flame. This apparently concerned the U-boat commander, and fifteen minutes after firing his first torpedo he sped a second destructive missile into the San Nicolas's stern. Her hull ruptured, she settled quickly stern first.

The Ramona carried her survivors to Maracaibo, and left behind the hulk of the San Nicolas, a burning Gulf tanker, Monagas, and an oil slick that marked where the Tia Juana had sunk beneath the Caribbean. The Tia Juana was the first hit of those ships sunk along the lake route. The watch on the Ramona had mentioned to Provence the feeling of untoward incidents, and that earlier he had seen flashes. What he didn't know at the time was that he had seen the Tia Juana explode.

She was torpedoed amidships and flamed immediately.

In minutes she heeled over sharply. Water rushed through her crumpled side and eased her below a flame-covered surface taking seventeen of her crew with her. Only nine survived. Of the four Lago lakers torpedoed the morning of Feb 16, the crew of the Tia Juana suffered the largest number of casualties.

Semeleer and other survivors were kept in Maracaibo for two weeks and then flown back to Aruba. Not deterred by the incident, the stocky fireman returned to lake tanker duty and served on the Quirequire and the Jama-nota. He also was aboard the tanker Valeria when she foundered March 7, 1944, during an Aruba to Panama voyage. Provence left the Shell fleet during the war. He joined Lago's Marine Department Aug. 4, 1947. Both men are now on Lago towboats. Semeleer is an oiler and relief tug engineer and Provence is a tug engineer.

The reactions of Seroe Colorado residents who leapt from their beds at 0131 Feb. 16 were varied. They as others had and others would until the war burnt itself out reacted in degrees of curiosity, fear, indifference, ire, panic. Families whose bungalows overlooked the lagoon were awakened to a war that had spilled itself and all the fire and destruction that goes with it at their very doorsteps. The Fred C. Eaton family was one brought abruptly to the face of war. The Eatons lived in waterfront bungalow 12, which no longer exists. The sleeping area in the residence was away from the sea. The glow of the burning Pedernales, however, disturbed Mrs. Eaton's sleep.

She wakened her husband and pointed to the orange glow that glanced through the louvers and flickered erie fingers of light across the ceiling. Eaton rose and from the front of his house he saw the burning tanker. His immediate conclusion, comforted in the complacency which seemed to have predominated the thought of most residents, was that someone must have been careless; it must have been an accident. The thought of enemy attack never entered Eaton's mind.

He peered into the lagoon area watching the flames mount. A second ship, farther downwind, exploded. Complacency still was the guiding attitude. Thought Eaton: a spark from the burning ship blown by the Trade Winds must have ignited the second tanker. A display of pyrotechnics zoomed overhead. Eaton reasoned that the fire aboard one of the ships had reached the rocket box and the flares were exploding at will.

Suddenly the mantle of disguise was pulled clear of Eaton's thoughts and the clarity of more realistic reason-

ing stunned him. Those were not ship's flares. They were tracer projectiles being jettisoned from an unknown enemy lurking outside the reef. The conflagration that beset the two ships was not due to carelessness, but rather the direct result of definite, planned and efficient action. Those ships were torpedoed. This was no accident, no; this was war.

Eaton's first reaction was to move his family away from the waterfront house. Normally a location that attracted active bidding, the waterfront residence was not exactly the most desirable spot during a war. He roused his little girls, Alice, two and one-half years, and Susan, three months. Outside his house he glanced down the road in the direction of the refinery and was startled by a sudden flash of fire. This turned out to be caused by blow downs.

A. T. Rynalski breezed by and told Eaton to take his family to the vicinity of the Lago Community Church. He did, and he and his family huddled on the steps of bungalow 241 where they watched the flaming waters.

Eaton's family was spared direct enemy action as were all the families in Aruba. The only scrap the Eatons suffered Feb. 16 was the collision their blacked-out car had with another while both were proceeding to the shelter of the church congregating area. Others were not quite as careful about their lights. Bright little spots of incandescence flicked on in homes and then were doused quickly when the users realized this was war. Some residents drove to the lagoon area with car lights blazing until they realized this was not accidental fire. One who was greatly concerned with lights in the harbor area was the then general manager, L. G. Smith. He dashed along the boardwalk throwing rocks at the lights that illuminated the walkway from the main dock to the lake tanker dock. He extinguished all of them.

The community residents concentrated on moving from areas in close proximity to the refinery and tank farm. Some watched the fires burn themselves out, and saw the unsinkable Pedernales drift away. The ambulance raced back and forth taking the injured to the hospital. The harbor was alive with small boat activity bent on rescuing survivors. Watching the action from the deck of their ship was the majority of the crew of the SS Henry Gibbons. Only the crew and few others knew of the 3000 tons of TNT in the ship's hold.

The ship's sailing had been delayed by coffee, it was reported. She had been scheduled to sail shortly after midnight, but the crew's insistence to have coffee before

they sailed kept the ship at its San Nicolas Harbor berth. The concession granted and the desire filled, the Henry Gibbons eased away from its berth shortly after 0100, Feb. 16. The ship was almost in position to clear the harbor exit when the Pedernales went up in flames. The captain wanted to continue full ahead, but the pilot refused to proceed into what he adjudged certain disaster. The Gibbons was returned to her earlier berth. The Army ship left later in the morning when the submarine threat had been cleared by Allied aircraft.

With the exception of the Gibbons, there was no ship traffic in or out of San Nicolas Harbor Feb. 16. In fact, it was packed with ships nestled together inside the protective reef barrier.

In one Lago desk drawer atop a sheaf of papers, newspaper clippings, baseball schedules and travel folders reposed a suggestion. It was written in detail, checked and ready to be dropped into the company-sponsored suggestion system. The suggester, however, wanted to be satisfied that he had presented his idea as logically as possible to ensure earnest consideration and hopefully high remuneration. It was indeed a worthwhile suggestion thought Henri M. Nassy, former public relations employee and today head of the Surinam Government's information service. It would save men's lives, and surely save the company money in products and equipment. It would also assist the Allied cause by protecting needed petroleum products and sorely needed tankers.

But he was a little too intent on explicit wording and proper composition. He also procrastinated a mite, and as a result the suggestion was still in his desk drawer Feb. 16, 1942, the morning after two loaded tankers anchored outside the reef had been blown apart by enemy submarine action.

His suggestion: anchor waiting tankers inside the reef to help protect them from enemy submarine action.

After the Feb. 16 shelling, many residents of homes in close proximity to the refinery or tank farm got fidgety. This was to be expected and quite natural particularly at about nine the morning after the attack when groups of men and women reconstructed the events of the previous hours. The conclusions were many, but they all spelled out the same answer. Whereas before the infamous attack complacency was the rule, now fear was the master of many. They had visions of returning submarines, and what had happened that morning was just

the beginning. Their reappearance, the queasy were sure, would be accompanied by better marksmanship and more definite plans of attack since one U-boat had already seen the physical layout of the refinery. Their assumptions were predicated on the fact that one U-boat had surfaced and fired on the refinery.

Little did these people know, and, of course, there was no way for them to know, that not only the U-156, but three other German submarines had for the past two days and nights carefully observed both the Lago and Shell refineries and had made numerous practice runs on unsuspecting tankers. The U-156's shelling of the refinery was not her commander's introduction to the plant's layout. Hartenstein, exercising the thoroughness that marked the man, previously had studied every detail visible through his periscope of the harbor's openings, the configuration of the harbor and location of its piers, the roadstead area, the tank farm and the factory, as Hartenstein referred to the refinery in his log.

Residents near the refinery nevertheless reasoned in fear that the U-boat commander would relate his findings to other underwater destructors. It would be only a matter of time before Lago and environs would be consumed by holocaust inflicted by the Nazi navy. Absorbed in frenzied packing to move their households a safe distance from the sea and refining unit-lined shore of the largest Allied refinery, many couldn't be bothered with much of their physical belongings. They, in moments of frenetic, unthinking actions, gave not the first thought to the labors that afforded them the possessions they quickly cast aside as cumbersome, bothersome, irrelevant to pressing desires. Out into the cunucu was the only thought.

Some, however, did choose to stay. And of this group there were the quick-witted who saw opportunities to gather unto themselves additions free or very low priced. One such industrious resident happened to be constructing a fence around his property. In the course of the mass exodus he looked around to see who had a fence he might appropriate for a slight fee. His neighbor, whose home was enclosed by an attractive picket fence, was among those making a dash for the cunucu.

"Where are you going?" the stay-at-home asked.

"I'm going out into the country. Got to get my family out there as soon as possible. Too close, too close to the refinery here. Those Nazi subs will come back and shoot a couple more tankers, then shoot at those tanks and we will all go up in flames. Not me, I'm going quick."

"You're leaving your house?"

"Yes, immediately."

"Aha, will you sell me your picket fence since you're leaving?" asked the unafraid, excited at the thought that the laborious task of constructing a fence for himself could end this moment. It did.

"Sell it! Man, take it. I'm gone."

Feb. 16 was a jittery one for all. It was, to some before composure had been regained, much like sitting on a keg of powder waiting for the burning fuse to reach the explosive. Nerves were edged raw and tattered. People jumped at the slightest noise, especially sharp reports.

So it was that two Lago employees in a lavatory gave each other a skin-crawling scare. Finished washing his hands, one reached for a paper towel that drooped accessibly from a sparkling metal wall container. He grasped the towel's bottom edge and flicked his wrist. The motion was no more, no less than he had done hundreds of times before. The paper cracked against the container apron, as it normally did. Feb. 16 was not a normal day, however. The snap of the paper sent his associate into a body-stiffening moment of fright. As he did, the paper snapper reacted in involuntary unison. Both were sure the other had been shot.

Moments later they laughed as tensions eased and the ridiculousness of the moment became apparent. Said the second: "You missed, fire again."

Aboard the U-156, which lay submerged in waters north of Aruba the daylight hours of Feb. 16, Seaman Businger died of wounds inflicted by the exploding cannon. Seventeen hours after the attack, the U-156 surfaced with the island still in sight. Hartenstein intoned the Lord's Prayer, the crew sang "I Had A Comrade," and Businger was "delivered to the sea with full military honors."

The exploding cannon had ripped off Von dem Borne's foot. The ship's pharmacists were able to slow the bleeding, but Hartenstein realized he had to get his second watch officer ashore for proper medical attention. Feb. 17 he received permission from the Reich admiralty to put Von dem Borne ashore in Martinique, which he did Feb. 21.

After putting his second watch officer ashore, Hartenstein and the U-156 continued their underwater exploits in the Caribbean and Atlantic. Hartenstein's sternness and determination was felt by the crew when the boat left Martinique. He had his men hacksaw off the splayed end of the thick cannon barrel. When one man tired or his blade became too hot, he stepped aside and another took

his place until the barrel had been cut clean. Welders, working at night under tarpaulins to avoid being seen, fixed counterbalances on the cannon's barrel where Hartenstein, the skilled artillery officer, had positioned them.

Hartenstein completed three successful patrols in 1942. All were in the Caribbean and near Atlantic. He sank over 100,000 gross tons of shipping, which earned him the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross and placed him among the top thirty-five U-boat commanders. While the tonnage is not impressive by today's standards, twenty years ago 100,000 gross tons sunk represented an average of twenty ships. On three patrols — it is not known what Hartenstein scored on his fourth and last patrol — the U-156 sunk twenty-two ships.

These sinkings occurred in 1942 when U-boat operation was at its zenith. Allied merchant shipping suffered its worst month in June, 1942, when 141 ships were sunk. The most severe losses suffered in the Caribbean and Mid-Atlantic regions were in August, 1942. In that month forty-six ships — four credited to Hartenstein — were lost. Operating 1,170 U-boats in World War II, the German submarine force sank 2779 merchant vessels which totalled over fourteen million gross tons.

The end of the U-156 and its thirty-three-year-old commander came March 8, 1943, approximately 340 miles east of Barbados. A United States patrol bomber from Squadron VP-53 returning from patrol sighted the surfaced submarine. Men lounged on the deck sunning themselves. The PBY Catalina ducked into clouds and dived at the U-boat. The plane flattened out at 100 feet over the completely surprised crew and dropped four bombs, two of which straddled the conning tower.

The U-156 broke into three pieces and sank immediately. The patrol plane sighted survivors and dropped a life raft and rations to them, but surface craft never found them.

The U-156 was not the last submarine to visit Aruba. Although Hartenstein operated in Caribbean waters until his and his U-boat's destruction, he never returned to the area of his first victories. Others did, and one in particular not long after the U-156's attack.

It was shortly after mid-day in Oranjestad. It was typically bright and all the orange colored roofs shone in the gay manner that is an Aruban landmark. Perhaps it was the roofs, but more probably and logically it was the Hooiberg promontory, which served Hartenstein as a landmark, that lent itself as a navigational aid for the submarine which surfaced in the still waters off Oranje-

stad. It came up and floated leisurely on the surface much like a whale lolling in the tropical sun. The comparison is not unfounded. Many whales, mammals, were "sunk" because their shape resembled that of the U-boat.

And while the submarine sat and its officers looked, the students returning to Juliana School tumbled down to the waterfront to see the submarine. The children, unconcerned with the poised danger, gave full freedom to their curiosity in the excitement of viewing an instrument of war and of history.

A carpenter at work on a waterfront home looked complacently out to sea from his perch atop a ladder. Relaxing a moment, while still appearing to be at work, he suddenly saw the sea monster break through the water's surface. He smiled to himself as he recognized the form shedding water to be a submarine. His smile was reassurance to himself that all was safe; here was a United States' undersea vessel standing by to protect Aruba. His composure was shattered with the alerting cry of Nazi submarine. The carpenter, seized with nervousness, fell from his ladder. He lay stunned on the ground. When he dared move again, he was no worse because of his fall, only a couple of sore spots and an anxious moment.

He stole a guarded look over the water, but the submarine had gone. It had dived when planes from Princess Beatrix Airport took off after the unwanted prowler. The appearance of the submarine caught the Oranjestad population with desires directly opposed. Half the citizenry raced to the waterfront to see, the other half raced into the cunucu to get away.

Aruba was never shelled again, and tankers were never sunk along the island's perimeter. The only enemy blow suffered by this little Caribbean island was the first launched by the Nazi war machine in the Western Hemisphere. While Aruba and her residents lived in anticipation of enemy action against the refining installation that provided the lion's share of fuel for the Allied advance, it never came. The enemy rose up out of the sea occasionally to look on, but he held his fire. Some submarines were reported sunk by Aruba based air and surface craft, but none recreated the infamy of the morning of Feb. 16, 1942.

W. C. HOCHSTUHL

Acknowledgements

An effort with as many facets as the narrative of the U-156 necessarily must be approached painstakingly to insure accuracy. Work of this nature can not be accomplished alone; the cooperation of many is needed. The author is indebted to those named in the story, those whose identification follow, and the many, many others who supplied a name, a bit of action, a smattering of sequence, a time, a location, a description, all of which helped make this story complete. To our knowledge, it is the only complete account of the U-156's exploits leading up to and the actual raid on Lago.

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Of tremendous help was Kapitanleutnant D. A. von dem Borne, German Federal Navy, Kiel, former second watch officer of the U-156 who lost his foot during the Lago attack. Without Herr Von dem Borne's assistance, the account would not have portrayed the intimacy of life aboard the U-156. Pictures of the submarine and her crew were supplied by him. To complete Herr Von dem Borne's story, he became a prisoner of war when the Allies retook France and her possessions including Martinique. Two years later the United States military flew him to New York where he boarded the SS Gripsholm with other Germans involved in prisoner exchange. The exchange took place May 19, 1944, in Barcelona, Spain, and Herr Von dem Borne returned to Germany.

-WCH





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